



Bound by
Love

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Christa Madrid

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*Greater love has no one than this,
than to lay down one's life for his friends.*
~John 15:13~

Port Royal, Jamaica, 1682

Chilling gusts of wind sent ocean sprays across the harbor, sprinkling the city's auction square as if to forewarn of a coming storm. The sky was overcast with gray, the sea dark and agitated. Not a speck of sunlight hinted at scattering the gloom that hovered over the city. The darkness was enough to keep most families inside, leaving shop owners and vendors bored at their counters. But a remnant of valiant citizens huddled against the gale, determined to weather it for the sake of the auction to be held there. Most were English sugar plantation masters, but a few fashionable ladies stood at their husband's sides, their plumed bonnets and layers of skirts threatening to fly from them. Yet they stayed, for a keen eye was needed to determine the quality of the merchandise to be sold.

The idle talk and stamping of chilled feet ceased as a tall man dressed in a ship captain's uniform strode from a nearby warehouse and across the square. His boots clicked with purpose as he walked with his squinty eyes focused straight ahead of him. He stepped onto the platform and slowly rotated to pierce the crowd with his gaze as if to ascertain what ranking of people waited to buy from him. If his countenance were not so dark and foreboding, he would have been considered handsome. But his features were too contorted with greed and cruelty to be worthy of such a compliment.

Not waiting for an introduction, he spun suddenly and clapped his hands toward the warehouse. "Bring her!"

Collectively the crowd took a step backward as a girl was shoved across the threshold of a three-storied warehouse

building. A massive man with a countenance as cruel as the auctioneer's dragged her to the platform. The girl staggered up the steps to the platform and was jerked to an upright posture by the firm grip of her master.

The attendees looked at each other with confusion. The slave was not an African at all, as they had come to expect, but a fair Spanish girl. She was dressed in a ridiculously frilly gown meant to distract from her mass of tangled hair, bare feet, and thin figure. Her face was as pale as the whitecaps along the coastline, and her hands trembled with the chills of fever. Only her master's restraining grasp kept her from crumpling to the concrete auction slab.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the slave owner bellowed, "I have here a young lass quite accustomed to hard labor. She'll make a fine cook or maid for your home. Now, who will give me fifty—and no less!"

The surprise at the girl's lack of colored heritage slowly subsided as the ladies turned to their husbands. With their eyes still on the girl, they began to whisper their doubts and expectations. It was several minutes before a hesitant hand raised in agreement.

The auctioneer threw back his head and let out a cunning laugh. "Do you suppose such a rare specimen is not worth more than that? Come now, who will give me seventy-five?"

The bid began to rise little by little until it reached one hundred and twenty-five. The slave trader's face beamed with the pleasure of making such a profit off a mere figure of sickly skin and bones.

"You won't stop there, will you, folks? What's a mere one-fifty for the work you'll get in return, hey?"

One timid hand rose from the center of the crowd. But when the auctioneer tried to push it to one hundred and seventy-five, he was met with blank stares. Trying to keep his irritation from showing, he pushed the girl forward, nearly sending her toppling from the platform. He opened

his mouth to shout “Sold!” but the words didn’t have time to escape his mouth.

“I will give you two-fifty, Hulin,” came a voice near him.

There was such authority in the deep voice that even the slave girl was prompted to lift her aching head to peer at him from beneath her ratty crown of hair. Several feet from her master stood two well-dressed gentlemen, looking quite like father and son. The younger man was somewhat slimmer than the other man, yet just as tall and handsome. The man who had spoken stood with his feet well apart as if prepared for a fight. Beneath graying sideburns, his square jaw was set, and firm, and his eyes held those of her cruel master without flinching. She watched as his hand opened and closed around a slender black riding stick.

Hulin began to shake with rage as he faced him. This man of integrity had never ceased to be a thorn in his side, a very hindrance to his profession. His chest heaved with the fury he felt until he spat, “Who will oppose this man’s bid and give me two-seventy-five?”

His eyes continued to hold the other gentleman’s until the silence caused him to bellow, “You cowards! Are you afraid to bid against this man? Give me three hundred!”

But again, no one made a move to raise the bid. The price was far too unreasonable, especially for such an emaciated girl who surely would be in no state of health to work for at least a week.

Hulin, his face now purple with frustration and anger, leaned forward and shouted at his opponent, “I will not give her to you, you dirty—”

“I will give you four hundred,” the man said calmly, yet with the same intensity.

Hulin spat on the ground. “Never, you conniving fool! I will give nothing to you!”

“Five hundred.”

“No!”

“Six hundred.”

“I will never—”

“Seven hundred.”

“Enough!” Hulin grabbed the girl and tossed her like a rag doll toward his burly assistant, who stood by waiting with several more downcast slaves. “Take her away!”

The girl was snatched from her fall to the ground and carried toward the warehouse.

The crowd now looked eagerly, yet with a sense of awe, to the English gentleman for his response. His rigid stance told of restrained fury as he slapped his wand in his gloved hand. Then the second man, almost forgotten in the argument, stepped forward to talk quietly in his ear. The older gentleman’s face turned pale, and he grasped the young man’s shoulders.

“Are you certain, Joshua?”

The young man stood a bit taller, his comely face revealing a resolve that was not soon to be denied. “Remember Catherine, Father.”

His father’s jaw worked as he struggled with the past memory of another young woman. But at last, he let go of his son’s shoulders.

“I will come for you,” he promised. “Be strong. He will not have you forever.”

“You will care for her?” his son pressed, not seeming to be concerned for his own welfare.

“Just as I’d care for you.”

The two exchanged a long, binding look. Then Joshua ran forward and cried, “Stop!”

The sound of his voice was so abrupt against the quiet that hovered over the square that even the slave owner’s assistant stopped mid-stride to look behind him.

Joshua’s pace quickened as he neared the man. He snatched the girl from his evil grasp and, before the other man could respond, swiftly carried her to his father. He

faced Hulin with his chin high, and his eyes darkened with the mission that beckoned him. "I will take her place."

The crowd gasped and stirred at the astonishing proposal. Nothing, in all the history of their city's slave market, had anything such as this happened. A wealthy merchant's son offering his life for a destitute and sickly slave girl? What could possess him to do such a thing?

Hulin's unyielding demeanor relaxed as his mouth dropped in astonishment. He stared at the lad of no more than twenty years of age as if he were a ghost.

"I said *I will take her place*," Joshua repeated. "Let her go free."

Hulin recollected himself and glanced toward his baffled assistant. Then he looked at the father of this outrageous boy. He saw neither fear nor pain in the man's countenance—only a pride and love that Hulin knew nothing about. An evil light came into Hulin's eyes, and he smiled maliciously at the thought of separating his rival from his very flesh and bone.

"Well, my boy, I think we have a deal." Then to his right-hand man, "Take him!"

Before Hulin's man could reach him, Joshua stooped down where the girl had fallen in a heap. Gently he lifted her and placed her in his father's arms. Again the two shared a look of which they alone knew the meaning. The next moment he was dragged away to a fate the crowd could only imagine.

Captain Elliot eased the bedroom door open. By the light of a small lamp near the door and the last bit of daylight peaking from behind the closed drapes, he made out Brandy's delicate form beneath the bedspread.

Never, in all his visits to the auction yards, had he encountered a white slave among so many African slaves.

The sight of the Spanish girl had sent renewed anger coursing through him. For those first few days since the auction, he had feverishly researched, hoping to find some family background that would enable him to return her safely home. But the information he had gathered had been dismal.

Hulin, a pirate as well as a slave trader, often raided Spanish ships, plundering their goods, and sending their crews overboard into the Pacific waters. Several years before, Hulin had captured a Spanish immigrant ship, saving only the pretty Spanish girl among his wealth of stolen goods. He had called her "Brandy" and had used the seventeen-year-old in a way that would have mortified any young woman. The girl, once accustomed to simple peasant life in the care of loving parents, became the brunt of Hulin's every whim. The wretchedness she suffered weighed her down until she no longer held the demeanor of a free and happy young woman. But after several years in Hulin's possession, he tired of her and had sent her to the auction block where Captain Elliot had found her.

Upon her arrival at the Elliot estate, she had been bathed, clothed, and placed in the tender care of the household maid Alice. For several days she had tossed and turned with fever, her now clean and brushed hair wetted by the perspiration that poured from her brow. She muttered incoherent phrases, crying for mercy from some unknown terror. The household had feared for her life. Her body, already frail from years of hard work, had been buffeted by the cruelties of her master. Bruises had been found upon her arms and back, and her tiny frame told of malnutrition and illness. The very sight of her had sent Alice weeping to her bedroom before she could collect herself and delve into her role as a nurse. After a week of vigil and prayer, Brandy had finally snapped out of her fever. She had slept soundly for nearly twenty-four hours until realizing she was with strangers.

Now her eyelids fluttered open, and she looked across the room at the tall and broad form of her benefactor. Captain Elliot watched as her white hand closed upon the bed sheet as if it held some means of protection. Alice took the moment to quietly slip from the room.

Brandy's brown eyes never left his face. "Who—who are you?"

"I am Durant Elliot, the master of this home."

At the mention of "master," Brandy flinched. "What are you going to do with me?"

"You will not be sold," he reassured. "You are now safe and free."

Brandy squeezed her eyes shut against painful memories. "You—you tried to buy me from Hulin, didn't you?"

"I did."

"And Hulin . . . he took another man in my place?"

"Yes . . . that was my son Joshua."

Brandy gave a small, mournful cry. Then her agonizing dreams were not of her imagination! It was more than she could bear to know that the tortured man she dreamed of was this man's son.

She heard Captain Elliot walk to the other side of the room. The sound of moving fabric drew her to open her eyes. Captain Elliot stood next to a portrait on the wall. "This is my son Joshua. He and Hulin are now on a slave ship bound for Africa." He turned to look at her with no malice for the reason his son was not safe at home. His gaze held nothing but deep compassion. "And you, dear, are under my protection."

Brandy stared at the painting, taking in the soft blue eyes and the gentle curve of a smile on the young man's lips. Immediately she turned her head away. The innocence she saw only brought more torment to her heart.

A cry of agony escaped Brandy's mouth, and she sprang to a sitting position in her bed. She looked wildly about her before collapsing once more upon her pillows. Sobs heaved from her chest until she was gasping for breath.

"Have mercy!" she sobbed. "Please, bring him back! I was the slave . . . he did not deserve it. Bring him back. Please . . . bring him back!"

She froze when her door slowly opened, and light entered the room. Candle in hand, Captain Elliot stood in the flickering shadows.

"Oh, forgive me, sir! I did not mean to . . ."

Captain Elliot set the candle on the bureau. "Don't worry, my dear. I have been aware of your fitful nights for some time. I've been waiting outside, so I might help you."

Even in the semi-darkness, Brandy could see the concern and kindness in his look. It was that same gaze that smiled from the portrait . . .

She bit her lip and turned her face away, not willing to face such goodness in the light of her unworthiness.

"Tell me about what you see in your dreams," he urged. "There's nothing to fear."

His soothing voice brought more tears to her eyes, but she could not withhold the truth from him. "I see the auction—every detail of it. Your son . . . he's treated cruelly—worse than I have ever been treated. Hulin . . . beats him. He and his men burn him . . . It's so awful!" Her body shook as her fear-filled eyes stared at the portrait. "Why did he do it? I did not deserve it!"

He gently sat on the end of her bed. "Brandy, allow me to explain."

She looked at him with sorrow and agony. It was a look that Captain Elliot had seen many times—a look that drove him on in his quest to see these people free.

"You must understand that Joshua freely took your place at the auction block. He was not coerced to give over his freedom to live the life of a slave. He *chose* to. And there

was nothing that could have caused him to relent in his decision. He desired your freedom above his own.

“It is a gift to you, Brandy. A gift he wants you to enjoy and receive. To see you grieving in this way would only make his sacrifice less meaningful. He desires your joy out of this. Simply receive the gift, Brandy. Take it as yours and share it with others.”

“But—but I cost him his *life*. He was so good . . . and I so . . .”

“It has nothing to do with who you once were, Brandy. In his eyes, you are just as love-worthy and valuable as the king himself.”

He stood and reached for a book on a shelf behind him.
“Do you read?”

“Y-yes, sir.”

“This—this was my daughter’s Bible. Read the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – the Gospels. They will tell of a Man who inspired Joshua to do what he did for you. It will help you understand.”

Brandy mutely gazed at the book placed in her hands. Captain Elliot said nothing more but silently exited the room.

In the light of the moon cascading across her bed, Brandy began to read. It provided an escape from the nightmare that was certain to resume once she fell asleep. As the moon continued to rise in the night sky, she began to read, “The Gospel according to St. Matthew . . .”

Brandy poured over the Book for the next several days. Hardly a moment passed when she was not found bent over its pages, her lips moving as she read each word. When her dutiful maid brought her meals, she was always found in a posture of deep concentration. The activities of the household and even Alice’s frequent visits failed to distract

her. Slowly her eyes were opened to a Man who showed unconditional love, goodness, and peace. A man who promised to fill her life with joy—no matter what a person's sins had been, no matter their social status. A man who had given His life just for her—as Joshua had. It awed her until her dreams were no longer filled with visions of torment and anguish but of a Man whose soft voice and caring eyes beckoned her to release her broken and bruised heart into His tender hands.

Just days after Brandy had received her Bible, Alice knocked on Brandy's door, only to receive no answer. She glanced up and down the hall but saw no one. Brandy had never ventured from her room and certainly did not know her way around the great mansion.

Concern wrinkled Alice's brow, and she gently pushed the door open. There, kneeling on the rug with her head against the bed's counterpane, slept Brandy. Her hand rested atop the thin pages of her most recent treasure as her shoulders rose and fell with soft breathing. Traces of tears remained on her cheeks, but there was no evidence of turmoil on her features.

Alice knelt beside her and gently touched her shoulder. "Brandy?"

Brandy gave a start and blinked at being suddenly roused. Then she smiled for the first time since her arrival at the Elliot home. "He's my Savior, Alice."

Alice stared in wonder. The cloud of depression and anguish had disappeared from Brandy's countenance. A light she had rarely seen had replaced it. "What do you mean, Brandy?"

Brandy reached up and smoothed the Bible's pages. "Jesus . . . loves me, Alice. Loves me as no one else has. And—and He gave His life for me. Now, just like the Bible says, I've received Him like a child." Brandy brushed at her cheeks. "I asked Him, Alice. I asked Him. And I know He received me, too. I feel it inside."

“Oh, Brandy!” Alice breathed, wrapping her arms around her. “That is . . . so wonderful. So wonderful!”

“I should tell Captain Elliot,” Brandy said once she had been released. “I—I hope he will see me. He gave me this Bible, and I thought—”

“Brandy,” Alice interrupted, “never be afraid to approach Captain Elliot. He has expressed his desire to speak with you many times. He would love to hear of your new relationship with Jesus.”

“Is he home now?”

Alice smiled. “Yes, dear. With the hope that you will desire to come to talk with him.”

Brandy’s eyes softened at the thought of someone desiring her presence—her conversation. Surely Captain Elliot was like Jesus, too. Her heart beat a bit faster at the thought of approaching her benefactor. But something inside told her she *must*.

Alice grasped Brandy’s hand and assisted her to her feet. She helped Brandy comb her hair and straighten her dress, then led the way down the long corridor, down the immense staircase, and into Captain Elliot’s study. Brandy stood before him, the extravagance of his home threatening to overwhelm her more than his gaze upon her.

“Good evening, Brandy. I’m very pleased that you came down.”

Brandy hugged the Bible to her chest. “I—I have something to tell you, sir.” Reverently placing the Bible on his desk, she continued, “I have asked—asked Jesus to be my Savior.”

Captain Elliot glanced at Alice, who stood apart with a beaming countenance. Slowly he stood and reached out to take Brandy’s hands in his. “I am most pleased, my dear. Most pleased.”

Brandy could not help the bubble of joy inside her at receiving his approval. She smiled fully and allowed herself to be engulfed in a fatherly hug.

As the autumn turned to winter, so Brandy's life transformed into one of beauty and newness. She could not fully express all the joys she discovered as she searched the Holy Scriptures to find who she truly was in God's eyes. The distraught and timid girl that had entered the Elliot home that blustery day in November no longer existed. A beautiful young woman had emerged from the rags of slavery, graced with joy and gentility found in her relationship with her Savior.

There, at last, came a day when Captain Elliot announced that Brandy was ready to be introduced to the trading city of Port Royal to see his merchant business and to meet his colleagues. Day after day, he introduced her to a life Brandy had never dreamed of taking part in. Little by little, her charms became known to the outside world as Captain Elliot took her with him to fine dinners, shopping excursions, tours of the city, and visits to his local warehouse. It was not long before people forgot she had been a slave.

But despite the flattering social finery and attention, Brandy found herself returning again and again to the simple things that she had come to know at the Elliot home. Her favorite times were spent at Captain Elliot's side, gleaning from his tender guidance. He was a constant tutor in her new life as he encouraged and explained new truths that brought light to her eyes. Though he was often gone on business, she cherished the times they spent together. Unlike her former master, she did not cower in his presence. Captain Elliot was more than her benefactor—he had come to be the father she had lost.

“You will always be changing as you draw close to Him, Brandy,” Captain Elliot said one evening before a warming fire. “He will make you into the woman he

destined you to be. You've changed already in such a way that no one who had known you before could possibly recognize you. You are a new person."

Brandy studied his face, soaking in every word.

"You once belonged to the darkened kingdom of the devil. But now—now you are a child of God. Just as you were brought out of slavery by the life of my son, so you have been brought out of slavery to sin by the ransom of Jesus Christ.

"You are no longer a slave," Captain Elliot continued, stressing the words so she might grasp their value, "spiritually or physically. You belong to a different family now, Brandy. And with that change of heritage comes a name change."

"A—a name change?"

"The name Brandy was given to you by Hulin, was it not?"

"Yes." At one time, the very mention of her former master would have sent chills up her neck. But no more. Her days of fear were over.

"Well, you no longer belong to him. Now you must bear a name that represents your new life — your new identity. One that has a beautiful meaning."

Brandy hardly knew how to respond, but the thought was an intriguing one. "Then what shall I be called?"

"Elizabeth," Captain Elliot said, "which means 'consecrated to God.'"

"Elizabeth," she repeated. The name was indeed beautiful, and its meaning was just as precious. What could compare to being consecrated to God?

"I—I've never been so happy," she murmured, gazing into the fire. "I learn so much each day—I could hardly imagine living without Jesus."

Captain Elliot simply smiled in understanding.

"But—but at times I feel there is something missing."

He waited for her to continue.

“It seems so impossible. Yet . . . yet I wish . . . I wish more than anything that Joshua could be here. I no longer dream of him being tortured. I now see him surrounded by light as he stands on a ship’s deck. He looks so happy. And it’s as if he is beckoning me, though to do what or—or to go where I do not know.” She sighed. “I want to thank him one day—to tell him how wonderful it is to know what it’s like to be free from constant beatings and—and work. How could I ever repay him for what he’s done? Somehow, I know it’s impossible. I should not even think of it. I *know* how Hulin is. He will treat Joshua with the same bitterness and spite he would treat you if he had the chance. It would be a miracle from God Himself to bring him back alive.”

Captain Elliot listened attentively to her sudden rush of words that came straight from her heart. But he knew that deep inside this blossoming young woman came more than just thankfulness for what Joshua had done for her.

“Elizabeth,” he began. “Do you remember how Jesus promised that he would rise again after his death?”

She nodded.

“Then so shall you see Joshua.”

“But—but you don’t know . . .”

“Trust what I say, Elizabeth.” He leaned forward with earnestness. “You *will* see him again.”

Elizabeth studied his face. Jesus had done all He had said He would do and much, much more. She had sensed Him—known His touch. Surely, if Joshua were anything like Jesus, he would do the same.

“I believe what you say,” she said, her chin rising with conviction. “I believe.”

“Would you like to run an errand with me?” Alice asked Elizabeth one sultry Jamaican afternoon.

Elizabeth laid aside the history book she had been reading. With a whole library open to her use, learning had become a passion. "I'd love to."

A few minutes later they were weaving their way through the stalls of a bustling produce market. Elizabeth had visited this center of business several times before and was recognized and greeted by many of the dealers who respected her connection to the Elliot's. Alice could only smile with pride as Elizabeth did the Elliot name proud with her friendliness and graciousness toward those quite below the family ranking.

On their way home, the two ladies chatted amiably together, waving their fans against the humid heat. Several blocks from home, Alice suggested they take a different route to visit a flower merchandiser. Elizabeth agreed and they turned down several streets she was not familiar with.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Elizabeth said, gazing up at a stately home as they walked by. "Who would have thought the English could become so wealthy here?"

"Some of the finest merchant families live in this neighborhood," Alice explained. "Across the street is the Winchesters' home. They have the most adorable children. Captain Elliot used to associate with Mr. Winchester quite often. But that was before . . ."

Elizabeth looked at her quizzically. "Before?"

Alice waved her hand in the air. "Never mind, dear. It's a rather long story and quite a long time ago."

Their talk was interrupted as they rounded the corner of a red-bricked mansion. They both came to a standstill as they beheld a large crowd in the town square less than a block ahead of them. Towering above the people's heads on the auctioneer's platform stood the infamous figure of Hulin.

Alice gasped and turned to Elizabeth beseechingly. "Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry. I had forgotten that we would pass this way. Come, we'll go . . ."

But Elizabeth made no move to follow. She stood rooted to the spot as a rush of memories came back to her: Brawley dragging her across the square. Hulin's painful grip on her shoulder. The humiliation and pain of standing, ugly and destitute, upon the stone. Captain Elliot's commanding voice speaking for her, and Joshua's declaration of substitution. She felt her hands tremble at her sides as nagging thoughts of hatred toward the man who brought her so much pain filled her mind. But just as suddenly, she remembered Jesus, the Redeemer of her soul, and the feelings fled. Elizabeth took a deep breath and relaxed her tense body.

“Elizabeth . . . please,” Alice begged. “This is no place for you.”

Elizabeth gently pushed aside Alice’s tugging hands. “I do not wish to leave . . . Alice, is that Peter?”

Alice looked where Elizabeth pointed. In front of the crowd, stood Captain Elliot’s head warehouse watchman Peter. The redhead Scot stood a good head taller than most of the men in the crowd. He was not dressed in his usual uniform but in the elegant costume of a businessman.

Elizabeth’s eyes grew wide with horror. “Alice, what is he doing here?”

Alice bit her lip, her expression stressing her wish that they had never stumbled across this foreboding place. “Elizabeth, Captain Elliot . . . heads a system of rescuing slaves from—from the auction block. He sends disguised men—like Peter—to outbid any man who tries to purchase certain slaves.”

Elizabeth could not answer Alice’s frantic explanation. She watched as Peter continued to raise his hand as the bid rose. “I must help him,” she murmured and began to walk toward the crowd.

“No, Elizabeth!” Alice cried. “You mustn’t!”

But Elizabeth paid no heed to the warning. She ran across the square and pushed her way through the crowd in a

way that would have disgraced any fashionable woman. But Elizabeth was too focused, too intent on her destination, to think of social etiquette. Reaching Peter's side, she stood with purpose and determination, caring little if her former master recognized her.

As Peter raised his hand once more, he spotted her standing at his side. His hand immediately dropped. "Miss Elizabeth!" he hissed, his Gaelic brogue betraying the fear he felt for her safety. "What're you doing here?"

Elizabeth's chin rose in defiance toward any objection he might raise. "I have come to represent Captain Elliot. Allow me to bid."

Peter's mouth gaped. "B-but where will you get the money? I have just now reached my limit."

"I have my means."

Peter still hesitated, looking with anguish toward the platform. If Elizabeth were recognized . . .

"It's the least I can do, Peter. *Please*, if only for Joshua's sake."

Peter's jaw worked with the decision he had to make. "All right, miss. But at my word—"

"Four hundred!" Hulin bellowed. "Do you have anything to add to that, mister?"

Seeing Hulin looking at Peter for an answer, Elizabeth's hand shot into the air. "I bid four-fifty."

Hulin's head jerked around, and he gawked at her, aghast. What was this young woman doing so boldly bidding in a crowd of more men than women? But how could he say no to such a lovely customer? "Four-fifty it is! Who will give me five hundred?"

Five hundred seemed to be beyond the crowd's purses, for no one uttered a word or raised their hands. Elizabeth held her ground, quite aware that many disapproving ladies stood whispering behind her.

Hulin stepped from his podium and slowly walked toward her; his eyes narrowed in scrutiny. He stood but a

foot from her and stared hard into her vaguely familiar face. Elizabeth's heart pounded within her at his nearness, a feeling she had not experienced for many months. But she would not flinch. Joshua's example loomed too great in her memory.

"You are one rare specimen, lady," was all he said after several agonizing moments. Then he turned and pronounced the slave sold.

Elizabeth could not help the rush of air that escaped her lungs. She gripped Peter's arm for support and looked toward the auction block. Standing with head bowed in shame stood an African girl not much younger than herself.

"Captain Elliot! Captain Elliot!" Peter called as they entered the warehouse an hour later. "You'll be so proud! Miss Elizabeth . . . she's gone and bought—"

"Peter, Peter," Captain Elliot chastened as he walked out of his office. "Whatever are you yelling for?" Then he saw Elizabeth holding up the weak slave girl. "Elizabeth . . .?"

"She raised the bid just when I couldn't go any higher," Peter continued, bubbling with excitement. "And Hulin stared right into her face. But bless me, I don't know why he didn't recognize her."

"And He shall give his angels charge over thee," Captain Elliot quoted quietly, reaching to brush Elizabeth's ruffled hair. "Peter, please take the girl downstairs where she can change and rest."

"Yes, sir."

When they were gone, Captain Elliot asked softly, "How did you pay for her, Elizabeth?"

"The weekly allowance you've given me these months . . . I have been saving it. I didn't quite have enough to make the full purchase, but Peter added a small portion of it."

Elizabeth's eyes pleaded for his understanding. "I-I hope you don't mind . . . but I couldn't justify spending so much on myself."

He shook his head. "No, no, Elizabeth. It was your money to do with as you pleased. But tell me, why did you do it?"

"I had to." Elizabeth's eyes filled with tears, for the full impact of what she had just done, began to slowly dawn on her. "For Joshua."

Captain Elliot smiled knowingly.

"I—I had no choice, sir. When — when I saw Hulin and—and Peter, I knew what I had to do. In light of what Joshua did, how could I stand and do nothing when someone so much like myself stood in the very grips of that hated man?"

"You have experienced what I have felt for many, many years, Elizabeth," Captain Elliot said, seating her on a nearby china crate. "It's a drawing — a stirring — that causes me to act on the conviction I hold."

"Dear Joshua," Elizabeth pronounced the name tenderly. "Where would I be if not for him?"

Captain Elliot looked away thoughtfully. "Elizabeth . . . there is something I knew one day I would tell you . . . and I feel that now is the appropriate time."

Elizabeth waited silently for him to continue.

"You see, Joshua once knew a lovely girl. They were such close friends that even Joshua's male companions failed to distract their relationship. This young lady — she had a pure, unassuming heart. She only wanted to give of herself — so great was her love for people." Captain Elliot took her hand as he reflected on the story he had told. "One day she came upon a young slave girl being beaten by her mistress in a back alley. She interfered, demanding that the girl be set free. But the woman was in a drunken rage and turned the leather strap on the young woman instead. That night we found her in the back alley, unconscious and wounded."

“Did—did she recover?”

Captain Elliot shook her head. “Her body was so weakened, and her head so battered that the doctors could do nothing for her. But on her deathbed, she would not allow Joshua to seek revenge on her behalf. She only begged that he redeem someone from slavery—someone who had no hope of a better future if it were not for the love of God working through him. Joshua waited years for the right opportunity. And on a November day many months ago, he found the recipient of his assignment.”

“Who was this wonderful young woman,” Elizabeth asked quietly, “that Joshua should do this for me?”

A tender smile graced Captain Elliot’s features. “Her name was Catherine Elliot—Joshua’s elder sister.”

Elizabeth shut her eyes. “Oh, Mr. Elliot . . . how could she . . . how will I ever . . .?”

“She did it out of love, Elizabeth. And it’s that same love that compelled Joshua to do what he did for you. The same love that will bring him home.”

Elizabeth slowly stood and walked a few paces away. Moments of pensive silence passed before she returned to her place beside Captain Elliot. She looked at him with the same resolve with which she had stood before Hulin. “Captain Elliot . . . will you allow me to join your work? I—I wish to further the cause that Joshua stood for—that you stand for. I wish to see others helped by my freedom.”

Captain Elliot knelt before her and took her hands. “I have waited for this day, Elizabeth. I had hoped, prayed, that you would not squander the wealth that I have offered you but would share it with those less fortunate. I am proud of you, my dear, and welcome you with no hesitation.”

“Thank you,” she responded. “I will do my utmost to bring honor to this work.”

“I know you will.”

From that day forward, Elizabeth gained the reputation of having a tender heart toward the parcel of former slaves who came in each week, sick and low in spirit, just as she had once been. Once she realized how imparting God's love to others could repay Joshua and Elizabeth for their sacrifice, there was no withholding her from coming each day and spending hours at their bedsides. She delighted in telling how she had been ransomed and how Jesus wished to ransom them from slavery far greater than the one they had suffered. Each person left the haven at Captain Elliot's warehouse with a knowing in their hearts that they were loved and valuable. It was only a matter of time before Elizabeth's name was revered and cherished right next to Captain Elliot's. The hope they were given was something they would carry with them for the rest of their lives.

"I—I wish there be some way I could repay ya," one man said as he prepared to leave for his new abode in the countryside.

Elizabeth only smiled, knowing very well in her heart the burning desire to give something of value in return for what she had received. It had been the passion of her heart — one that kept her serving beyond her own strength. It was for the love of someone she knew only by name. "Just spread God's love and goodness like it has been given to you," she answered. "That is payment enough."

The old gentleman tipped his tattered hat and bowed in gratitude.

"The wagon is waitin', Mr. Thomas," Peter announced as he entered the building. "You're welcome to go whenever you're ready."

"Thank ya, thank ya," Mr. Thomas murmured, pumping Peter's hand. He nodded once more toward Elizabeth, then exited the warehouse.

“I have news from Captain Elliot for you, Miss Elizabeth,” Peter said when the man was gone. He tugged a sealed letter from his pocket and handed it to her. “I saw him off at the pier just minutes ago.”

Elizabeth looked at him, startled. “Where is he going? He never mentioned—”

“It was rather sudden, miss,” Peter said. “The letter will explain.”

Peter bowed slightly and left her. Elizabeth broke the seal and read:

Dearest Elizabeth,

I regret that I could not say a proper goodbye at my departure. But urgent business has arisen which I must attend to immediately, and I cannot spare a moment to do more than send this letter. I am sorry that I cannot disclose any details with you. But rest assured, you will know in time what has called me away.

You have proven yourself to be a reliable and committed assistant, so it is without hesitation that I release the oversight of our work into your hands. Peter is aware of future purchases and will inform you of when more arrivals are to come. Do as you have always done – nurse, acquire room and board, and secure jobs for them. Most of all, share God’s love with them. I am confident that you know my heart in such a way that you will make decisions as I would.

My return is uncertain, so I ask that you watch for me at the harbor on a regular basis. I may be gone for months but never lose heart. Pray for me as you have prayed for Joshua these few years. Dangers unknown arise on the seas, and I desire God’s wisdom on this mission. Rest assured, you will be in my constant thoughts and prayers as well.

With much love,
Captain Durant Elliot

Elizabeth brushed aside the tears that trickled down her cheek. They were not tears of sorrow, but of joy at his confidence and love.

“I will do my utmost to do just as you have said, sir,” she murmured. “With God’s grace, I shall bring honor to your name in your absence.”

Captain Elliot stood at the starboard rail of his ship and peered across the sea, dark with the coming of night. For several weeks his three hardest ships had been sailing, following the invisible course of his prey. They had yet to see the slave ship that had eluded them day after day. But Captain Elliot knew within him that they would soon come upon it. What would ensue after their discovery was something he could only hope would not be a massacre.

His thoughts then turned toward Elizabeth. He had prayed for her many times a day, asking God to give her strength, both physically and emotionally, so that she would be able to carry on without him. Whether she recognized it or not, Captain Elliot knew without a doubt that the fortitude needed for the responsibility resided inside her. She was born to be strong, to be a strength to others. She was called to lead the way in things others would deem impossible. It was not a mistake that he had come upon Hulin’s auction block that blustery November afternoon. God had assigned him there that day. And it was for a purpose that she had spent nearly three years in his home, preparing for the mission she was called to. A mission that would be shared with his own son.

Suddenly a shout came from the crow’s nest. A moment later, his first officer was at his side. “The ship has been sighted, sir.”

Captain Elliot was not the least surprised. He had been expecting such an announcement. "Stand by for further instructions."

The man whirled to repeat the simple command, not noticing how the captain dropped to his knee in prayer. Captain Elliot stayed in the position until his heart filled with peace, and he knew for certain what his next steps would be. Unknown to him, a quiet prayer was being lifted hundreds of miles away by a young woman who thought of him as her father.

Amidst leaping flames and the fierce shouts of his sailors, Captain Elliot raced across the ship's deck. His anxious feet clambered down the plank steps to the hold below. He threw open doors as if the very world would end if it were not for his speed.

"Joshua! Joshua! Can you hear me?" he called again and again. But the racket above swallowed his cry for the one dearest him. "Oh, Lord, help me find him!"

Captain Elliot ignored the soot that smeared his face and the splinters that pierced his hands. Though he had searched every cabin, he would *not* lose hope.

"Father God, give me wisdom," he panted, coming to a standstill. "Show me where he is."

He gazed about the dark interior of the ship, welcoming any sign of where he was to search next. Only a moment passed before he caught sight of a short flight of stairs leading to the landing just outside Captain Hulin's chambers. Without hesitation, he sprang up the steps and pushed at the door. It was locked. "Joshua! Joshua, are you in there?"

"Father? Is that you?"

Captain Elliot could have cried for joy. "Yes, it's me, son. I have come for you, just as I promised."

“Hulin has bound me to a chair,” came the feeble voice from inside. “You’ll have to break the door lock.”

Captain Elliot took several paces back, then heaved his shoulder at the door. The lock snapped against the force, and he sprang over the fallen door toward his son.

“I—I can hardly believe my eyes,” Joshua said, adjusting himself so his father could remove the ropes that bound him. “Is it you that has attacked us?”

“Yes, we’ve captured Hulin’s ship.” Captain Elliot let the ropes fall to the floor. “My men are transporting our prisoners to my other ships. But this ship is in flames and in danger of sinking at any moment. We must make haste to leave immediately.”

He helped his son to his feet, and together they ran to the deck, where they were engulfed in smoke.

“You’ve found him!” an overjoyed sailor exclaimed. “Come, follow me, and we’ll soon have you safely aboard the *Morning Wind*.”

Captain Elliot released his hold on his son and allowed the skipper to assist Joshua over the edge of the ship. He began to feel his own fatigue, but it mattered little. His mission was now complete, for he now had Joshua back. His heart sent a grateful prayer to the starry sky above before he too embarked upon the *Morning Wind*.

Before rising from her bed, Elizabeth felt a keen sense that she must go to the shipyards. It was that same feeling she had gotten over a month before in the middle of the night. Suddenly she had been wide-awake, though no sound had disturbed her deep sleep. But as she had sat up beneath her bedding, Captain Elliot and Joshua’s faces had flashed before her. Immediately she had known that she was to pray for them. For over an hour she had prayed for their

protection and strength until at last, she had felt a release to crawl into bed once more.

Now, as the sun began its early morning climb into the sky, she did not hesitate to obey the urge to leave the house. Quietly she dressed and left a note for Alice, who would soon be summoning her for breakfast.

As the summer light bathed her steps through the neighborhoods, she once more lifted Joshua and Captain Elliot to her Heavenly Father. From the first few months she had lived with Captain Elliot, Elizabeth had never ceased to send prayers heavenward for Joshua. They were prayers, not of fear, but of love and trust. She prayed for his safety, for strength to endure until he could once again see his beloved home. She prayed that he would have favor with all those he encountered, for she knew the bitterness of the spite of another.

And since Captain Elliot's departure, she had added him to her earnest prayers. Wherever he was and whatever took him away, she trusted that God would be with him. She was certain that God heard her prayers and would answer in bringing the two men dearest to her heart safely home.

Her steps slowed as she neared a place far too familiar. Ahead stretched Port Royal's market square, large and spacious when not occupied by crowds of people. Elizabeth squinted against the early morning sun and gazed about the vacant area. It had been so long since she had been a slave at this place. But the memory of it was still so real. She could still see the milling people, Hulin's cruel face, and the sunless sky that seemed to say she had no hope.

But these memories were now mixed with visits she had made with Peter and other disguised men to purchase destitute slaves. She had changed so much since her former enslavement to Hulin that a low-hanging bonnet was all that was necessary to conceal her. Some of those days had been as dreary as her day at the market. Others had been as

beautiful as today, yet the same feeling of foreboding had hovered over the square.

“You did so much, Joshua,” Elizabeth murmured. “It does not matter how long I wait for you. I shall honor you with my devotion to this cause if there is breath within me.”

A glimmer of light caught her attention then, and she looked across the square to the docks. Before her stood the most wondrous ship, she had ever seen. Its masts were massive and white against the azure sky, its rich wood telling of elegance and riches. Bronze trimmings reflected the sun, and beautifully colored flags rippled like the waves beneath the ship's bow. Elizabeth gasped at the majestic sight, for no other ship in that harbor could have compared to it.

She remembered Captain Elliot's descriptions of his ships. Elizabeth had been awed then, but nothing could have properly described what she was seeing now. Her heart racing, Elizabeth dashed across the empty square.

She did not slow when she reached the dock but flew across the boards until she reached the rope ladder that hung over the side of the ship, barely dangling within reach of her outstretched hands. Not thinking of the lovely coral dress she wore, the white gloves protecting her hands, or the flowered bonnet atop her rich brown tresses, she seized the rope and swung toward the ship. She held tight until the swaying stopped, then used her experience aboard ships to begin her nimble ascent up the ladder. It was not easy going with her full skirts blooming about her in the breeze, but she eventually managed to grasp hold of the rail and pull herself aboard. She distractedly snatched her askew bonnet from her head and let her hair fall as she called out, “Hello!”

No friendly voice answered her call. Certain she would find her master aboard, she searched the upper deck until she discovered a staircase descending to the hold below. Up and down the halls and cabins she searched but soon came to believe she was the only one on the ship. It seemed eerie

standing in the galley with only the reminiscent creaking and splash of the waves outside breaking the silence.

Disappointment caused Elizabeth's lips to tremble, and she slowly made her way down the corridor and up the steps to the deck above.

“Are you looking for someone?”

Elizabeth whirled, nearly tripping over a mass of tackle coiled on the deck. She raised her tear-filled eyes to look above the broad chest of the seaman, muscled from work at the mast and oars. But the glare of the sun kept her from seeing his face.

“I—I was looking for the captain of this ship.” Elizabeth hung her head and slowly turned away. “But I must be mistaken to think this ship belongs to him. Please excuse me for intruding.”

“I don't think you're mistaken.”

Elizabeth paused, for the voice held none of the harshness she had come to know from other sailors. No, this voice was cultured and—and even tender. Hesitantly she turned and looked up to meet his gaze. This time she saw his face distinctly. Her eyes grew wide, and her hands sprang to her mouth. Though the face was tanned and manlier than the portrait in her room, she would have recognized those kind and caring blue eyes in the darkness of night. “*Joshua?*”

“You know me!” His face broke into a smile as joy resonated in his voice. “Just like Father said you would.”

“I—I have always believed you would return, but I didn't know . . .” Elizabeth struggled between tears and an overwhelming desire to laugh. “Please tell me what miracle has brought you here!”

“Just a few short weeks ago Father found me aboard Hulin's slave ship.”

“*Found* you?”

“For months, he has studied Hulin's course on the oceans, trying to determine his schedule. He discovered Hulin's plan to bring more slaves to this port and set sail to

meet him. As you well know, Hulin is not only a slave trader but a murderous pirate as well. No one has dared cross his path until four weeks ago when my father's three fastest and hardest ships surrounded him on the water. Hulin tried his hardest to fight him and his crew, but he was no match for their strength. He, his crew, and his ship were captured and taken to the capitol for trial. But Father and I have traveled home together on this ship – the *Morning Wind*.”

“B-but didn’t you suffer?” Elizabeth questioned, noting how fit and healthy he looked. “Hulin knows all too well how to . . .” She stopped at the memory of how she had once struggled with nightmares. They had been real enough to convince her that it had truly happened.

Joshua’s hand reached to unconsciously rub his shoulder. “Oh, I bear the marks of his cruelty. I was not treated as human, but as something that would carry out his commands . . . or else.” He shook his head. “But God was my strength. Only He could have sustained me. I saw many slaves tossed overboard in a matter of days because of his demands. Anything short of God’s grace would have sent me to my ocean grave.”

Then he smiled again, spreading out his unbound hands for her to see. “After a month of rest aboard Father’s ship, my strength has returned fully, and here I stand before you, free of Hulin’s mastership.”

Elizabeth could only stand in wonder at it all. “I-I am forever indebted to you, dear Joshua. To you and your father.”

“There is no debt to speak of, Elizabeth.”

“Then—then I offer you a heart of gratitude—” she too extended her gloved hands “—and a lifetime of love and service.”

“I accept your offer,” he said as his eyes told her he meant every word, “and extend to you the same. Would you consider sharing my life?”

“Joshua, I, too, have given my life to the work you have begun. I have no other desire than to—”

He reached to take her outstretched hands. “No, Elizabeth. What I mean is—will you marry me?”

Elizabeth’s breath caught in a tiny gasp. She had only dared to hope that this man whom she had come to adore would return that love. Now, on a day she had dreamed of for three years, he stood before her, inviting her to share his life with him. The joy she felt was beyond anything she could have imagined. “Yes, Joshua . . . I will marry you.”

The smile that lit his face was enough to let her know that her answer brought the same joy to his heart.

With a rush, the wind sent the sails ballooning, and *Morning Wind* pulled away from the Port Royal shipyard. The crowd, stretching from the pier to the auction square, let out a cheer. Men waved their hats over their heads as their wives daintily waved their hankies in the breeze. Children clung to the edge of the pier, leaning far in a childish attempt to send a spray of ocean water to the couple at the ship’s railing above.

Joshua and Elizabeth lifted their hands in farewell, smiling their appreciation to their audience below. Elizabeth’s veil swelled with the sails, but there was no fear of blowing away, for Joshua’s arm around her provided security beyond the railing that kept them aboard.

“Look at them!” Joshua laughed. “You’d think they were the ones being wed.”

“You are much loved,” Elizabeth responded, giving his hand a squeeze.

“We are much loved,” he corrected. “You mean as much to them as I do.”

Indeed, half the crowd consisted of those who had been touched by the Elliot family in years gone by – including Captain Elliot’s daughter. Many of these past slaves now had families of their own. The children, though not well acquainted with Captain Elliot, Joshua, or Catherine, knew well the loving deeds that offered freedom to their parents.

“There’s Father,” Joshua said, “at the end of the pier.”

“Farewell, Papa Elliot!” Elizabeth called across the water as she blew the gentleman a kiss. They had gained a good distance from the shore, but Captain Durant Elliot’s hand still lifted in a salute as if he understood every word.

Slowly the people became tiny black dots against the shore as the *Morning Wind* cut its path through the rippling Pacific waters. Soon the creaking of the ship and the rush of the sea beneath the bow were all that was heard.

“How many times have I looked over a scene like this,” Elizabeth said quietly, waving a hand toward the sea beyond the starboard, “and yearned to enjoy it outside the chains that bound my hands.”

“One gains a new appreciation for the sea when they discover freedom from the God who created it,” Joshua responded. “It makes all the difference.”

Elizabeth turned toward him and gazed up into his deep blue eyes. “I know I’ve said it before, but thank you—thank you for enabling me to know Him, to know the blessing of freedom. You did what no one else was willing to do, and I love you for it.”

Joshua gently drew her closer and placed a kiss atop her head. “I love you, Elizabeth. With all my heart.”

And as the brilliance of the noonday’s sunshine beamed down upon them, they basked in the boundless love that tied their hearts together.

A Call to Freedom

Perhaps you're like Brandy, bound by the chains of an evil master. Sin has you tied to its will so tight that it seems you'll never be loosed. You've never known the Savior, Jesus Christ, and desire to experience His unfailing love for you. If this is you, God the Father's arms are open wide for you to enter. Joining His family is as simple as rejecting sin and making Jesus the Lord of your life at no charge to yourself. It is a free gift.

Romans 10:9, 10 says, “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.”

If you want God's gift of eternal life, pray this prayer out loud: Lord Jesus, I am a sinner in need of a Savior. Because of my sin, I know that when I die, I will go to hell. I want to be saved. I turn away from my sins, and I call on the Name of Jesus to save me. Jesus, be my Lord and Savior. Forgive my sins. Give me a new heart and the gift of eternal life. I confess that Jesus is Lord, and I believe in my heart that God raised Him from the dead. Thank you, Jesus, for loving me and saving me!

If you prayed that prayer, you are God's child, no longer shackled by the devil and sin! You now belong to God and are a part of His family. You will spend eternity in heaven with Him! What wonderful things He has in store for you!